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22,000 Calif. Teachers Could Lose Jobs

Schools Aim To Cut Spending

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SACRAMENTO, Calif. -- California's budget crisis could cost nearly 22,000 teachers their jobs this year.

State school districts had issued 21,905 pink slips to teachers and other school employees by Monday, the legal deadline for districts to send preliminary layoff notices.

Not all the threatened layoffs will be carried out. The final tally depends on the state budget to be adopted for the coming fiscal year.

Last year, 60 percent of the 26,000 teachers who received pink slips ended up losing their jobs.

State Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O'Connell expected this year's actual job losses to be high, given the state's persistent budget problems and the smaller pool of education stimulus money available from the federal government.

"These layoffs would be devastating to our schools, would harm our communities and would harm our education delivery system," he said.

California schools rank at or near the bottom nationally in academic performance, student-teacher ratios in middle and high school, access to guidance counselors and the percentage of seniors who go directly to four-year colleges, according to a 2009 report by the Institute for Democracy, Education and Access at the University of California, Los Angeles.

The state's public schools employ nearly 307,000 K-12 teachers, according to the state Department of Education. About 7 percent of those teachers have received pink slips.

The layoff figures do not include classified school employees such as bus drivers, maintenance workers and cafeteria staff.

School districts have 45 days to issue pink slips to those workers, and as many as 10,000 could be facing unemployment, O'Connell said.

Education advocates say Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger and the state Legislature have made the job situation worse through their attempts to plug the state's \$20 billion budget deficit.

They say Proposition 98, a constitutional amendment passed by voters in 1988, requires the state to increase education funding each year based on the previous year's budget.

By keeping this year's education funding at last year's level of \$48 billion, as Schwarzenegger has proposed, the state is shortchanging schools by an estimated \$2.4 billion, according to groups representing teachers and school administrators.

Schwarzenegger spokesman Aaron McLearn said claims that education funding will be reduced are false.

"The governor has proposed protecting education while making devastating cuts in other areas to deal with our current deficit," McLear said. "We are funding education at exactly the same level as last year."

California's schools benefited greatly from federal stimulus funding in 2009, with more than \$4.8 billion in grants.

Earlier this month, the U.S. Department of Education rejected California's application for the first round of its "Race to the Top" competition, which will distribute \$4.3 billion to states for education reform.

Less government support for education will translate into more layoffs, O'Connell predicted.

"Last year's stimulus money saved thousands of jobs," he said. "I expect the number of pink slips enacted this year to be higher."

In addition to union salary concessions, some people are calling for more private funding.

"Find ways to raise revenue, find ways to create innovative partnerships with both public and nonprofit and foundations in order to fund what our priorities are," Sacramento City Schools Superintendent Jonathan Raymond said.

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